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FOR INFORMATION

UNICEF AND THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY

The World Summit for Social Development presents the international community with a unique opportunity to confront many of the world's most urgent problems. A focus on children emerges naturally from the Summit's three themes of poverty alleviation, social integration and employment. In each of these broad, long-term issues, children have the greatest interest. In the present document, UNICEF identifies five key objectives which it believes will help to ensure that the Summit marks an important turning point in finding lasting solutions to the problems of poverty alleviation, social integration and employment generation. UNICEF field offices are ready to support Governments, regional bodies and non-governmental organizations in their preparations for this important international event.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Over the next 18 months, the international community will confront many of the world's most urgent problems. The International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women represent an unprecedented opportunity for all of us to determine what kind of world the twenty-first century will hold.

2. The convergence of those three conferences, with their interlocking themes, comes at a critical time. All over the world, the ground is shifting. Political systems are becoming more open; economic structures, which long reflected rigid ideological positions, are being redefined in response to new needs; and relations between States and civil society are changing to reflect comparative advantages and mutual interests. To be sure, these massive changes carry with them tremendous problems of uncertainty and dislocation, but they also create openings for bold new ideas.

II. A FOCUS ON CHILDREN

3. For the world's children, and for UNICEF, the three conferences mentioned above represent a great opportunity. Viewed together, as they must be, given their overlapping themes, the three conferences are poised to tackle a range of issues that, in large measure, will help to shape the world our children inherit. The themes of the World Summit for Social Development, in particular poverty alleviation, social integration and employment generation, address broad, long-term issues in which children clearly have the greatest interest.

4. But there are other compelling reasons why the needs of children are naturally at the heart of the Summit. In a world deeply divided over ethnicity, language, religion, culture and ideology, the needs and rights of children are a unifying force, which bring us together on an ethical common ground. Moreover, lasting solutions to the problems of grinding poverty, social disintegration and growing unemployment depend critically upon the attitudes and values we impress upon our children. By encouraging pluralism, tolerance, gender equality and concern for others, we foster a sense of global community and partnership. The economic arguments for focusing on children are equally strong. Meeting the basic needs of children is the best long-term investment a society can make; it results in a healthy, well-trained labour force and sets the stage for poverty alleviation, social cohesion, slower population growth and environmental protection. In short, the themes of the Summit itself demand a focus on children.

III. BUILDING BLOCKS: PROGRESS ALREADY ACHIEVED

5. UNICEF brings to the World Summit for Social Development a set of mutually supportive building blocks. The first of these building blocks is the new development ethic emerging from the growing international embrace of the principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and, particularly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This new ethic gives

rights, codified in international law, an important new role in defining both the scope and the content of development efforts. Moreover, this evolution in our conception of development - from the expression of needs to the assertion of claims, the articulation of rights, the promulgation of laws and, finally, the adoption of practices (i.e., policies, programmes and projects) that give real form to the provisions of these laws - is establishing new standards to which national and international development actors will be held accountable.

6. A second building block is the growing consensus that human development must be the centerpiece of all development efforts. While we are still some distance from seeing rhetorical support for human development translated into substantial restructuring of national and international (e.g., official development assistance) budgets, progress is unmistakable. We have very largely succeeded in getting developing country Governments, donors and even international financial institutions to view expenditures on human development as investments, indeed some of the most cost-effective investments a country can make, rather than merely as consumption. This consensus has been aided by two key sets of lessons (a) the experience of the East Asian countries, which demonstrates the critical role that early investments in health and education have played in achieving and sustaining their high economic growth rates and sharp reductions in their total fertility rates; and (b) the experience of countries, such as Sri Lanka, and the Indian state of Kerala, which shows that impressive gains in human development, with a consequent major reduction in total fertility rates, can be secured even in the context of low incomes and slow economic growth.

7. A third building block is the experience that has been gained from a series of recent development successes: achievement of universal child immunization; rapid expansion in access to safe water supplies and adequate sanitation; growing acceptance of oral rehydration therapy as an effective, low-cost treatment for diarrhoea; dramatic progress in the attack on childhood malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies; greatly expanded access to family planning; successful innovations for increasing access to basic and primary education; and the growing recognition that improving the status and well-being of girls and women must be a prominent component of all development efforts.

IV. UNICEF OBJECTIVES FOR THE SUMMIT

8. UNICEF approaches the World Summit for Social Development with two sets of objectives. First, the most difficult issues - political and social disintegration, widening gaps between the rich and the poor, growing unemployment and high population growth rates - must be addressed head on by the world community and not hidden behind convoluted, stale and ultimately defeatist positions. By focusing attention on these urgent problems in its position papers and advocacy materials prepared for the Summit, UNICEF hopes to ensure that the Summit will mark an important turning point in finding lasting solutions.

9. Beyond this, UNICEF has six specific objectives for the World Summit for Social Development:

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(a) To identify, as part of its declaration and plan of action, clear targets for overcoming the worst manifestations of poverty, stimulating employment and encouraging social integration (analogous to the health, education, nutrition, women's development and water supply and sanitation goals adopted at the World Summit for Children) within a framework of long-term sustainability;

(b) To identify key elements of international support needed to guide or assist national action, especially in the area of poverty reduction. Africa and least developed countries elsewhere will require particular support;

(c) To promote a shift in our conception of peace and security from military means of peace enforcement and security of geographic borders to economic and social development as a means of diminishing the causes of conflict and tension;

(d) To agree on the elements of an international social charter that would provide the practical guidelines and broad international commitments for follow-up action nationally and internationally, including an emphasis on education for development;

(e) To call for accelerated action to achieve the goals for the year 2000 adopted at the World Summit for Children, and subsequently endorsed in Agenda 21 by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and for participating national leaders to demonstrate their commitment to social advances by reporting on the progress their countries have made towards achievement of the mid-decade goals they identified in 1992 and 1993;

(f) To encourage, in line with the concept of "20/20 vision", donor countries, developing countries and other partners to allocate greater financial resources to human development priorities.

V. THE WAY FORWARD

10. The UNICEF strategy for the World Summit for Social Development has four key elements. The first calls for close and effective alliances with Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the World Summit for Social Development secretariat. Ongoing consultations with industrialized and developing country Governments provide UNICEF with good opportunities to influence their perspectives on the Summit. UNICEF headquarters and regional offices are engaged in extensive collaboration with NGO planning committees and NGO forums that have been convened for the Summit. At the same time, a World Summit for Social Development task force has been established at headquarters to guide UNICEF collaboration with the World Summit for Social Development secretariat and to direct its involvement in the preparatory process leading up to the Summit. The six UNICEF regional offices are working closely with the United Nations regional commissions to help formulate the agendas of the regional expert group meetings and other preparatory meetings. As part of country programmes of cooperation, UNICEF field offices are ready to assist

Governments, national NGOs and other groups preparing to participate in the Summit by supporting, inter alia, the preparation of background papers and the development of national strategies.

11. A second element of the UNICEF strategy for the Summit is to use these alliances to contribute to the content of a draft declaration and plan of action. The UNICEF experience with the World Summit for Children demonstrates the critical role that declarations and plans of action, with ambitious but feasible goals and strategies and effective monitoring mechanisms, play in cementing conference commitments and ensuring effective follow-up activities.

12. The third element is to help countries achieve their mid-decade goals by December 1995, in follow-up to the World Summit for Children, as a concrete demonstration to all participants that they have the requisite national will to achieve "doable" goals set at such summits.

13. Finally, UNICEF is preparing a position paper, to be circulated in July 1994, that will outline in some detail its perspectives on the themes of the Summit. The 1995 edition of The State of the World's Children report will also feature a major section on the World Summit for Social Development. In addition, the UNICEF Division of Information is developing information notes and brochures on those Summit issues in which UNICEF has a particular interest.
